

Let's get our inactive patients moving!

I'm hoping the news headline on 10 May 2011 will read "BC doctors step out for Walk with your Doc initiative!" May 10 is the annual day proclaimed by the World Health Organization to draw attention to the importance to our health of being physically active. This event began last year with a small, dedicated group of doctors in BC who invited their inactive patients to go for a walk with them to symbolize the importance of being physically active. The event is sponsored as a formal project by the Council on Health Promotion with the goal of having an event in every community in BC—every year.

Just as the early 1990s saw BC doctors adopt a program to help patients stop smoking, doctors can again take the lead and help their more sedentary patients get moving. Canada is facing an epidemic of obesity with 59% of its population overweight or obese. Recent measured data also show that only 15% of adults and 7%

of youth meet the daily requirements of physical activity (150 minutes per week for adults and 60 minutes per day for children and youth). Combined, obesity and physical inactivity are threatening to create future generations with a shorter lifespan than their parents because of the higher incidence of chronic disease. While smoking rates have dropped by more than half, overweight and obesity rates continue to increase. In 2004 the Heart and Stroke Foundation labeled fat the new tobacco, and this year it stated that Canadians are in a state of denial about the impact obesity and inactivity will have on their lives. As a leader in your community you have the ability to make a difference in your patients' health and well-being and demonstrate the importance of incorporating exercise into daily life.

While it is true that increasing activity alone is unlikely to result in major weight loss, significant benefits can result from becoming moderately physically active. These include primary and secondary prevention of premature death, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis,

depression, and anxiety. These benefits are independent of other risk factors and to some degree are true even if one becomes minimally active (30 minutes of activity 5 days per week). As doctors, we see the people who are most at risk for these conditions and we need to promote the benefits of physical activity just as we have promoted the benefits of quitting smoking.

So please participate in this year's Walk with your Doc event taking place the second week in May. Information, posters, sign-up sheets, and free pedometers are available through the Council on Health Promotion at 604 638-2891 or lcaldwell@bcma.bc.ca. We encourage you to work with other physicians in your community to make this a successful event and to draw attention to it with your local media. Even though the 2010 Olympics didn't lead to any significant increase in activity among British Columbians, as doctors we can make a difference in our patients' lives through this initiative. So let's step out as we invite our patients to Walk with your Doc this May.

—Ron Wilson, MD, Chair, COHP
Athletics and Recreation Committee

This article is the opinion of the Council on Health Promotion and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.



An alarming number of Canadians are overweight.
Physicians can be part of the solution.

Walk with your Doc

An initiative of the BCMA's
Council on Health Promotion

Week of May 9 - 13

Promote physical activity to your patients.
Invite them to participate in the 2nd annual
"Walk with your Doc."

www.bcma.org/walk-your-doc

